Reviewer's report

Title: Key challenges in simulated patient programs: An international comparative case study

Version: 1 Date: 16 June 2011

Reviewer: Anne Hill

Reviewer's report:

General comment
Thank you for the opportunity to review this paper.
This paper adds important data to the body of information related to standardised patient programs throughout the world. The authors have contributed essential data relating to more practical aspects of SP use and have therefore greatly assisted current and new program developers/coordinators to review their own programs with these features/characteristics in mind.

Major Compulsory Revisions
Method
o need to know more about ‘multiple case study approach’ and the ‘analytic method of cross-case synthesis’
o I felt that there was not enough information about methodology

Discussion
o More analysis of challenges is required – why they exist, ways forward
o Further discussion of the concept of ‘culture’ is important
o No specific insights are offered into what should change or what would improve outcomes of SP programs. The authors have pointed out the developing SP programs may use the information within this paper to assist them but it would be a great opportunity to provide some guidance about managing the pitfalls/challenges

Minor Essential Revisions
General – some movement between tenses, present and past. Keep to consistent tense use.
Abstract page 3
• Intro
o ‘at the level of the program’ – do you mean practical implementation of SP methodology? -this term also used on page 15. Clarification would be useful.
o This paper is about medical programs - this needs to be mentioned clearly in abstract and introduction
• Results
  o ‘Programs shared challenges in SP methodology but also experienced differences’. Suggest a reword of this sentence to clarify. Is it that there are differences within the challenges or differences in other areas?

Page 4
  • ‘patient safety movement’ ??? remove ‘movement’
  • Use of ‘learner – centred’ and then ‘learner-centeredness’ – spelling?
  • ‘It is not possible to be both patient- and learner-centred in the same space’. Rather than ‘not possible’, ‘more challenging’?
  • ‘patient perspectives being offered’ – add ‘to trainees’
  • ‘That is, from planning through development, implementation and evaluation.’ – not a sentence- needs to be joined with sentence before it.

Page 5
  o line 6 – addition of comma after ‘real patients’
  o ‘reveals a gap in several aspects of SP methodology’ – is the gap in the understanding of this or a comparison of this or a discussion of this?
  o ‘This case study attempts to bridge these gaps’ - after referring to single ‘gap’ in line above
  o Question 2 – what are the key challenges for faculty’ not ‘of’ – on page 10, this changes to ‘challenges associated with faculty’ – consistency required
  o Bottom on page 5 – ‘secondary sources of data’?? To what does this refer? Explanation would be useful.
  o ‘Over eighteen months in formal and informal rounds of discussion the authors met to report…..’ – could this sentence be reworded?

Page 6
  o Description of 4 SP programs is within the results section of the document. It should be in the introduction as the description itself is not the result of the study –the comparisons are?
  o Unequal description of 4 programs. I found it difficult to make direct comparisons between the 4 programs as there were some comparative points but not all?
  o databases are first mentioned here but not explained until page 14 – need to describe more here.
  o ‘Our experience with SP programs are summarized….’ – grammar needs amending but also should ie be ‘characteristics and features’ rather than/as well as ‘experience’

Page 7
  o 1990s – no apostrophe
Writing of numbers – ‘eighteen’ on top of page 7 but numerals later?

Page 9

under-performing needs hyphen

bottom of page – ‘trainees’ – remove apostrophe

Page 10

‘SPs are more likely to have had formal actor training since London and Toronto have
relatively large performing arts communities.’ – this needs to be more definitive. Can you make a statement about the current SP pool – have they had more actor training?

‘…..use of structured protocols and rating forms. (new sentence). It may be…’

‘Training for assessments’ – do you mean training the SPs to assess – or just to take part in assessment OSCEs etc?

‘calibration of performance’ – explain more in order to emphasise this important point of ‘standardisation’

Page 11

What is specifically meant by ‘faculty development’? The authors describe ‘conferences’ below but a further sentence here to clarify would assist.

‘Although the SP program is working toward full faculty appointments, this process is complicated by the union presence’ – explain further. Union members also mentioned on page 12 in relation to Toronto. Is this a relevant point of comparison with other programs? – if not, delete, if so, more needs to be explained re comparative circumstances for other programs

Page 12

‘Administration support activities have include maintenance’ – delete ‘have’

‘Private enterprise’ mentioned – what is involved here? This is of probable interest to developing programs so a further sentence of explanation would be useful

Page 13

Mention of cost recovery and fee schedule for Toronto – who are fees paid by?

Page 17

In conclusion – need to state that the programs are for medicine

References

• spelling error – ‘involvement’

Table 1

‘Facilitates a systematic approach to curriculum activities’ - needs to be stated
as noun

Table 2
- In first column – ‘numbers on register’ needs to be ‘numbers of SPs on register’
- $ sign needs to be removed from Uni Toronto ‘hourly pay’
- Exclamation marks removed from Uni Toronto recruitment strategy
- Training program – all should include range/mean number of hours of training required

Table 3
- Table heading is ‘characteristics’ but there are numbers and percentages in table – need to clarify either in table heading or in row headings
- Row heading of ‘range’ should be ‘age range’

Table 4
- a, b, c, d etc headings under each of categories need to be consistent in expression e.g. all start with a noun or verb
- ‘Categories of SPs’ is the heading - but then ‘SPs’ are one of the categories?

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare I have no competing interests.